| Home | New Testament Studies | Romans Table of Contents | Previous Section | Next Section |

ROMANS 4

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
The Example of Abraham	Abraham Justified By Faith	Abraham Justified By Faith	The Example of Abraham	Abraham Justified By Faith
4:1-12	4:1-4	4:1-8	4:1-8	4:1-8
	David Celebrates the Same Truth			Justified Before Circumcision
	4:5-8			
(7-8)	(7-8)	(7-8)	(7-8)	(7-8)
	Abraham Justified Before Circumcision			
	4:9-12	4:9-12	4:9-12	4:9-12
The Promise Realized Through Faith	The Promise Granted Through Faith	The True Descendants of Abraham	God's Promise Received	Not Justified by Obedience to the Law
4:13-25	4:13-25	4:13-15	4:13-15	4:13-17
		4:16-25	4:16-25	Abraham's Faith a Model of Christian Faith
				4:18-25

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")
FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. Paul's shocking theology stated in Rom. 3:21-31 asserted that fallen mankind was declared to be right with God as a free gift, totally apart from the Law of Moses. Obviously Paul had Jewish opposition in mind! Paul now attempts to prove that his gospel was no new innovation (cf. Rom. 3:21b) by giving OT examples from both Abraham and David (cf. Rom. 4:6-8).

B. Romans 4 presents evidence drawn from the Law of Moses, Genesis – Deuteronomy, for the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This is summarized in Rom. 3:21-31. For a Jew, a quote from the writings of Moses had great theological weight, especially relating to Abraham, who was seen as the father of the Jewish nation. David (v. 6) was seen as a type of the coming Messiah (cf. 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17).

C. The tension in Rome between believing Jewish leaders and believing Gentile leaders may have been the occasion for this discussion. It is possible that the Jewish Christian leaders felt forced by Nero (who cancelled all Jewish rituals) to leave Rome. In the interim they were replaced by Gentile Christian leaders. The return of the first group caused controversy as to who should be in leadership positions of the people of YHWH.

D. Romans 4 shows that fallen mankind has always been saved by God's grace through human faith and repentance toward God in relation to the spiritual light they have (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3; Eph. 2:8-9). In many ways the New Covenant (gospel) is not radically different from the Old Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-36).
SPECIAL TOPIC: THE *KERYGMA* OF THE EARLY CHURCH

E. This way of righteousness by grace through faith is open to all, not just the Patriarchs or national Israel. Paul is here developing and extending his theological argument using Abraham, which he had earlier developed in Galatians 3.
SPECIAL TOPIC: WHY DO OT COVENANT PROMISES SEEM SO DIFFERENT FROM NT COVENANT PROMISES?

F. I must admit that as an evangelical, Rom. 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-21 and Galatians 3 are crucial texts. They explain Christianity in a way that I can understand! My hope lies in
   1. the merciful character of God
   2. the words and work of Christ
   3. the wooing of the Spirit
   4. the trustworthiness of Scripture
   5. the clear writings of Paul

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 4:1-8

[1]What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? [2]For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. [3]For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." [4]Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. [5]But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, [6]just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

[7]"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,

> AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED."
>
> 8"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

4:1 "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather" Abraham's name meant "father of a multitude" (cf. Rom. 4:16-18, BDB 4). His original name, Abram, meant "exalted father."

The literary technique used here is called a diatribe (cf. Rom. 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30). The reason for using Abraham (Gen. 11:27-25:11) as an example is either

1. because the Jews put such merit in their racial origin (cf. Matt. 3:9; John 8:33,37,39)
2. because his personal faith exemplifies the covenant pattern (Gen. 15:6)
3. his faith preceded the giving of the Law to Moses (cf. Exod. 19-20)
4. he was used by false teachers (i.e., Judaizers, cf. Galatians)

For some reason early scribes vacillated between

1. forefather, MSS ℵ*2, A, C*
2. father, MSS ℵ1, C3 D, E, G

Possibly it had to do with the question of Abraham as forefather (i.e., Patriarch, Paul is addressing Jews) of the nation of Israel versus Abraham the father of all who exercise faith in God (father of both Jews and Gentiles, Rom. 2:28-29).

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

SPECIAL TOPIC: TEXTUAL CRITICISM

▣ **"flesh"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: FLESH (*SARX*)

4:2 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE (cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol. 4, p. 350), which is assumed to be true from the perspective of the author or for his literary purpose. This is a good example of a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE that is false in reality, but serves to make a theological point (cf. Rom. 4:14).

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 33, p. 372, says this may be a mixed CONDITIONAL SENTENCE with the first part being SECOND CLASS (contrary to fact, "if" Abraham was justified by works, which he was not. . .") and the second being FIRST CLASS.

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

▣ **"justified by works"** This is the opposite of justification by grace through faith in Christ. If this way of salvation through human effort (Rom. 4:4) were possible, it would have made the ministry of Jesus unnecessary. Justification by works of the Law is exactly what many rabbis asserted in connection with Abraham (cf. *Wisdom* 10:5; *Ecclesiaasticus* 44:20-21; I Mac. 2:52; Jubilees 6:19-20; 15:1-2). Paul, as a rabbinical student, would have been fully aware of these texts.

However, the OT clearly shows fallen mankind's inability to perform the covenant works of God. Therefore, the OT became a curse, a death sentence (cf. Gal. 3:13; Col 2:14).

The Jewish scholars knew Abraham existed before the Law of Moses, but they believed he anticipated the Law and kept it (cf. Ecclesiasticus 44:20 and Jubilees 6:19; 15:1-2).

▣ **"he has something to boast about"** This theme often appears in Paul's writings. His background as a Pharisee sensitized him to this problem (cf. Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:29; Eph. 2:8-9).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOASTING

4:3

NASB, NKJV, NRSV, TEV	**"Abraham believed God"**
NJB, REB	**"Abraham put his faith in God"**

Peshitta "Abraham believed in God"

This is a quote from Gen. 15:6. Paul uses it three times in this chapter (cf. Rom. 4:3,9,22), which shows its importance in Paul's theological understanding of salvation. The term "faith" in the OT meant loyalty, fidelity, or trustworthiness and was a description of God's nature, not ours. It came from a Hebrew term (*emun, emunah*) which meant "to be sure or stable." Saving faith is

1. mental assent (set of truths)
2. volitional commitment (human choice)
3. moral living (a lifestyle)
4. primarily a relational (welcoming of a person)

It must be emphasized that Abraham's faith was not in a future Messiah but in God's promise that he would have a child and descendants (cf. Gen. 12:2; 15:2-5; 17:4-8; 18:14). Abraham responded to this promise by trusting God. He still had doubts and problems about this promise, as a matter of fact it took thirteen years to be fulfilled. His imperfect faith, however, was still accepted by God. God is willing to work with flawed human beings who respond to Him and His promises in faith, even if that faith is the size of a mustard seed (cf. Matt. 17:20).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE, TRUST, FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS IN THE OT

4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,22,23,24

NASB, NRSV	**"it was reckoned to him"**
NKJV	**"it was accounted to him"**
TEV	**"for God accepted him"**
NJB	**"this faith was considered"**
REB	**"faith was counted to him"**
Peshitta	**"it was counted to him"**

"It" refers to Abraham's faith in God's promises.

"Reckoned" (*logizomia*, cf. Rom. 3:28 and 11 times in Romans 4) is an accounting term which meant "imputed" or "deposited to one's account" (cf. LXX Gen. 15:6; Lev. 7:18; 17:4). This same truth is beautifully expressed in 2 Cor. 5:21 and Gal. 3:6. It is possible that Paul combined Gen. 15:6 and Ps. 32:2 because they both use the accounting term "reckoned." This combining of texts was a hermeneutical principle used by the rabbis.

The OT use of this term in the Septuagint is not so much a banking term as a bookkeeping term, possibly related to "the books" of Dan. 7:10; 12:1. These two metaphorical books (God's memory) are

1. the book of deeds or remembrances (cf. Ps. 56:8; 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16; Rev. 20:12-13)
2. the book of life (cf. Exod. 32:32; Ps. 69:28; Isa. 4:3; Dan. 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27).

The book into which Abraham's faith was ascribed by God as righteousness is "the book of life."

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE TWO BOOKS OF GOD

SPECIAL TOPIC: RABBINICAL HERMENEUTICAL TECHNIQUES

4:3,5,6,9,10,11,13,22,25 "as righteousness" This reflected the OT term "measuring reed" (*tsadak*). It was a construction metaphor used for the character of God. God is straight and all humans are crooked. In the NT it was used in a positional, legal (forensic) sense which hopefully is moving toward godly lifestyle characteristics. The goal of God for every Christian is His own character, or to put it another way, Christlikeness (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19).

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

4:5 The essence of faith is responding to the God who reveals Himself, without ultimate reliance on personal effort or merit. This does not imply that once we are saved and have the indwelling Spirit that our lifestyle is not important. The goal of Christianity is not only heaven when we die, but Christlikeness now. We are not saved, justified, or given right standing by our works, but we are redeemed unto good works (cf. Eph. 2:8-9 & 10; James and 1 John). A changed and changing life is the evidence that one is saved. Justification should produce sanctification!

SPECIAL TOPIC: SANCTIFICATION

▣ **"believes"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE.

SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST

▣

NASB, NKJV, REB, Peshitta	**"his faith"**
NRSV	**"such faith"**
TEV, NJB	**"it is this faith"**

Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness. This was not based on Abraham's actions, but his response. His actions confirmed his faith (cf. James 2:14-26).

The word "reckoned" is also used of Phinehas in LXX of Ps. 106:31, which refers to Num. 25:11-13. In this case the reckoning was based on Phinehas' actions, but not so with Abraham in Gen. 15:6!

▣ **"but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness"** This is a shocking statement! It is an obvious parallel to Abraham in Rom. 4:3 (Gen. 15:6). Righteousness is a gift of God (see note at Rom. 3:24), not the result of human performance.

▣ **"David"** As Abraham was not a perfect individual, yet was right with God by faith, so too, was sinful David (cf. Psalm 32 and 51, see notes online). God loves and works with fallen humanity (Genesis 3) who exhibit faith in Him (OT) and in His Son (NT).

4:6 "apart from works" Paul emphasizes this phrase by inserting it just before his OT quote (cf. Ps. 32:1-2). Mankind is right with God by His grace mediated through Christ by means of the individual person's faith, not their religious performance (cf. Rom. 3:21-31; Eph. 2:8-10).

4:7-8 This is a quote from Ps. 32:1-2; see notes online. Both VERBS in Rom. 4:7, "have been forgiven" and "have been covered" are AORIST PASSIVE. God is the implied agent. Verse 8 contains a strong DOUBLE NEGATIVE, "will not under any circumstances" be imputed, reckoned, taken into account. Notice the three VERBS in this quote; all denote the acquittal of sin.

4:7 "whose sins have been covered" This is a quote from Ps. 32:1. The concept of "covering" was central to the sacrificial aspect of Israel's cultus (i.e., Leviticus 1-7). By God covering sin (AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVE), He put it out of His sight (cf. Isa. 38:17; Mic. 7:19). This same concept, though a different Hebrew word for "covering" (*caphar*), was used in the ritual of the Day of Atonement (covering), where blood placed on the "mercy seat" covered Israel's sins (i.e., Leviticus 16). A related biblical metaphor would be to erase (cf. Isa. 1:18; 43:25) or blot out (cf. Acts 3:19; Col. 2:14; Rev. 3:5) one's sin.

4:8 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account" This is a quote from Ps. 32:2. It is the term "reckon," "impute," or "deposit to another's account" (see note at v. 3), used in a negative sense. God does not impute sin (DOUBLE NEGATIVE) into a believer's spiritual bank account; He imputes righteousness. This is based on God's gracious character, gift, and pronouncement, not human merit, achievement or worth (cf. Eph. 2:8-9)!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 4:9-12

[9]Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TOOO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESSS."" [10]How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; [11]and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,, [12]and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

4:9-12 Paul possibly included this discussion of circumcision because of the Judaizers' emphasis on the necessity of circumcision for salvation (cf. the book of Galatians and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15).

Paul, trained in rabbinical exegesis, knew that in Gen. 15:6 and Ps. 32:2 the same VERB appears (both in Hebrew text and Greek Septuagint). This would have united these passages for theological purposes.

SPECIAL TOPIC: RABBINICAL HERMENEUTICAL TECHNIQUES

4:9 The question of Rom. 4:9 expects a "no" answer. God accepts all people, even Gentiles, by faith (see note at Rom. 3:24). Genesis 15:6 is quoted again. Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, was reckoned righteous (cf. Genesis 15) before the Law of Moses (Rom. 4:13) and before he was circumcised (cf. Genesis 17).

4:10-11 "the sign of circumcision, a seal of righteousness of faith" After Abraham had been called and reckoned as righteous, God gave him circumcision as a covenant sign (Gen. 17:9-14). All the peoples of the Ancient Near East were circumcised except the Philistines who were of Greek origin from the Aegean Islands. For the other cultures of the ANE, circumcision was a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. In Jewish life it was a religious symbol of covenant membership, performed on males on the eighth day after birth.

In this verse "sign" and "seal" are parallel and both refer to Abraham's faith. Circumcision was a visible mark of one who exercised faith in God. The GENITIVE phrase "of the righteousness of faith" is repeated in Rom. 4:13. The key to being declared right with a holy God was not circumcision, but faith.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CIRCUMCISION

4:11 "that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised" The book of Romans was written after the book of Galatians. Paul was sensitive to the Jewish tendency of trusting in

1. their racial lineage (cf. Matt. 3:9; John 8:33,37,39)
2. the performance of the current Jewish interpretations of the Mosaic covenant (The Oral Tradition, or the tradition of the elders which was later written down and was called the Talmud)

Therefore, he used Abraham as the paradigm of all who believe by faith (father of believing, uncircumcised Gentiles, cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:29).

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

▣ **"seal"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: SEAL

4:12 "follow in the steps" This was a military term (*stoicheō)* for soldiers marching in single file (cf. Acts 21:24; Gal. 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16). Paul is speaking in this verse of Jews ("father of circumcision") who believe. Abraham is the father of all who exercise faith in God and His promises.

Because of the double ARTICLE (*tois*) it is possible that this second aspect ("following in the steps of") adds the concept of lifestyle faith (PRESENT MIDDLE [deponent] PARTICIPLE) and not a once-only faith. Salvation is an ongoing relationship, not just a decision or volitional moment.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 4:13-15

[13]For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. [14]For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; [15]for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

4:13 "the promise to Abraham or to his descendants" God made the promise of "land and seed" to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-8; 22:17-18). The OT focused on the land (Palestine), but the NT focused on "the seed" (Jesus the Messiah, cf. Gal. 3:16,19), but here "seed" refers to faith people (cf. Gal. 3:29). God's promises are the basis of all believers' faith (cf. Gal. 3:14,17,18,19, 21, 22,29; 4:28; Heb. 5:13-18).

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

▣ **"that he would be heir of the world"** This universal statement is very significant in light of Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18 and Exod. 19:5-6. God called Abraham to call all mankind (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 3:15; Exod. 19:5; Rom. 2:28-29)! Abraham and his descendants were to be a means of revelation to the whole world. This is another way of referring to the Kingdom of God on earth (cf. Matt. 6:10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVERS' INHERITANCE

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

▣ **"not through the Law"** The Mosaic Law had not yet been revealed. This phrase was put first in the Greek sentence to express its importance. This was a very important point which emphasizes the difference between human effort and divine grace (cf. Rom. 3:21-31). Grace has made the law obsolete as a way of salvation (cf. Heb. 8:7, 13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: PAUL'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC LAW

4:14 "if" This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes. Paul was using this startling statement to make his logical argument. This is a good example of a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL used for rhetorical emphasis. He did not believe this statement to be true, but stated it to show its obvious fallacy (cf. Rom. 4:2). See SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

Racial Jews with the visible sign of circumcision are not to be the heirs of the world, but those who exercise faith in God's will and word are heirs. Physical circumcision is not the true covenant sign, but faith (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Col. 3:11).

▣

NASB, NKJV	**"faith is made void"**
NRSV	**"faith is null"**

TEV	**"man's faith means nothing"**
NJB, REB	**"faith becomes pointless"**
Peshitta	**"faith would have been empty"**

This is a PERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE of *kenoō*, which emphasizes a settled condition of a strong Greek VERB that means "to empty," "to show to be without foundation," even "to falsify" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17). This term was also used by Paul in 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor. 9:3 and Phil. 2:7.

SPECIAL TOPIC: NULL AND VOID

▣

NASB	**"the promise is nullified"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"the promise is made of no effect"**
NRSV	**"the promise is void"**
TEV	**"God's promise is worthless"**
NJB	**"the promise is worth nothing"**
REB	**"the promise goes for nothing"**

This is also a PERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE which emphasizes a settled condition of a strong Greek VERB that means "to make empty," "to abrogate," "to bring to an end," and even "to destroy or annihilate." This term was also used by Paul in Rom. 3:3,31; 6:6; 7:2,6; 1 Cor. 2:6; 13:8; 15:24,26; 2 Cor. 3:7; Gal. 5:4; 2 Thess. 2:8. There is an obvious parallelism in this verse. There are not two ways to salvation. The new covenant of grace has made the old covenant of works null and void!

4:15 "the Law. . .law" The first use of this term has the Greek ARTICLE while the second does not. Although it is dangerous to draw too much attention to the presence or absence of the Greek ARTICLE, it seems in this case to help show that Paul was using this term in two senses.

1. the Mosaic Law with its Oral Tradition in which some Jews were trusting for their salvation
2. the concept of law in general (social norms)

This wider sense would include the self-righteous Gentiles who conformed to this or that cultural code of ethics or religious rituals and felt accepted by deity based on their performance.

▣ **"the Law brings about wrath"** This is a shocking statement (cf. Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-13; Col. 2:14). The Mosaic Law was never meant to be a way of salvation (cf. Gal. 3:23-29). This would have been a very hard truth for any Jew (or legalist) to understand or accept, but it is the basis of Paul's argument.

▣ **"but where there is no law, neither is there violation"** God holds mankind accountable for the light they have. Gentiles will not be judged by the Mosaic Law which they never heard. They were accountable to natural revelation (cf. Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19-20) and an inner moral compass (cf. Rom. 2:14-15).

This truth is taken one step further in Paul's argument here. Before the Mosaic Law clearly revealed God, He did not record mankind's violations (cf. Rom. 3:20,25; 4:15; 5:13,20; 7:5,7-8; Acts 14:16; 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:56).

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: ROMANS 4:16-25

16For this reason it is by faith, in order that it *may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he

believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. [18]In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." [19]Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; [20]yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, [21]and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. [22]Therefore also IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. [23]Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, [24]but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, [25]*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

4:16 This is a beautiful summary of Paul's argument from Rom. 4:14,

1. humans must respond by faith
2. to God's grace promise
3. the promise was certain to all faith descendants (Jew and Gentile) of Abraham who exercise faith
4. Abraham was the paradigm of all who are of faith

▣

NASB, NRSV, TEV, NIV	**"guaranteed"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"sure"**
REB	**"valid"**
NET	**"certain"**

See SPECIAL TOPIC: GUARANTEE

▣ **"all. . .all"** These refer to all believers (Jew and Gentile). See note at Rom. 3:24.

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

4:17-23 Paul again used Abraham to show the priority of

1. God's initiating grace promises (covenant)
2. mankind's required initial faith and continuing faith response (covenant, see note at Rom. 1:5)

Conditional covenants always involve the promises and acts of two parties.

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

4:17 "As it is written, 'A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS'" This is a quote from Gen. 17:5. The Septuagint (LXX) has "Gentiles." God has always wanted the redemption of all the children of Adam (cf. Gen. 3:15), not just the children of Abraham. Abram's new name, Abraham, means "a father of a multitude." Now we know it includes not just physical descendants, but faith descendants (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Eph. 2:11-3:13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: YHWH'S ETERNAL REDEMPTIVE PLAN

▣ **"who gives life to the dead"** In context this refers to the regenerated sexual powers of Abraham and Sarah (cf. Rom. 4:19).

▣ **"calls into being that which does not exist"** In context this refers to the pregnancy of Sarah with Isaac, but it also denotes a crucial aspect of faith (cf. Heb. 11:1).

4:18

NASB	**"in hope against hope he believed"**
NKJV	**"who, contrary to hope, in hope believed"**
NRSV	**"hoping against hope, he believed"**
TEV	**"Abraham believed and hoped, even when there was no reason for hoping"**
NJB	**"Though there seemed no hope, he hoped and believed"**
REB	**"when hope seemed helpless"**
Peshitta	**"he who was hopeless trusted in hope"**

The term "hope" has a wide semantical field. Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, p. 133, lists several usages.

1. basic meaning, hope (cf. Rom. 5:4; Acts 24:15)
2. the object of hope (cf. Rom. 8:24; Gal. 5:5)
3. the author or source (cf. Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:1)
4. trust, confidence (cf. 1 Pet. 1:21)
5. in security with a guarantee (cf. Acts 2:26; Rom. 8:20)

In this context hope is used in two different senses. Hope in human ability and power (cf. Rom. 4:19-21) versus hope in God's promise (cf. Rom. 4:17).

For "believed" see SPECIAL TOPIC: FAITH, BELIEVE, OR TRUST

SPECIAL TOPIC: HOPE

▣

NASB, NKJV, REB, Peshitta	**"So shall your descendants be"**
NRSV	**"So numerous shall your descendants be"**
TEV	**"your descendants will be many"**
NJB	**"your descendants will be as many as the stars"**

This is a quote from Gen. 15:5 that emphasized the surety of God's promise to Abraham about a son (cf. Rom. 4:19-22). Remember that Isaac was born

1. thirteen years after the promise
2. after Abraham tried to give Sarah away (twice, cf. Gen. 12:10-19; 20:1-7)
3. after Abraham had a son with Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian handmaid (cf. Gen. 16:1-16)
4. after both Sarah (cf. Gen. 18:12) and Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:17) laughed at the promise

Abraham and Sarah did not have perfect faith! Thank God, salvation does not require perfect faith, but only the proper object (God in the OT and His Son in the NT).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SATANIC ATTEMPTS TO THWART THE MESSIANIC LINE

4:19 "he contemplated" This translation follows MSS ℵ, A, B, C. But some ancient uncial manuscripts add a negative PARTICLE (*ou*), D, F, G. The UBS^4 is not able to make a decision ("C" rating), but prints the shorter text. The NET Bible also supports the shorter text.

SPECIAL TOPIC: TEXTUAL CRITICISM

4:20 Initially Abraham did not fully understand the promise, that the child would come from Sarah. Even Abraham's faith was not perfect. God accepts and deals with imperfect faith because He loves imperfect people!

▣ **"he did not waver in unbelief"** This same VERB, *diakrinō*, is used by Jesus in Matt. 21:21; Mark 11:23. Abraham had reasons (cf. Rom. 4:19) to question God's word (promise), but instead he grew strong.

The two VERBS in Rom. 4:20 are both AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVES. The PASSIVE VOICE implies the agency of God, but Abraham had to allow (covenant) God's power to energize him!

▣ **"giving glory to God"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*DOXA*, NT) and SPECIAL TOPIC: GLORY (*KABOD*, OT)

4:21	
NASB	**"being fully assured"**
NKJV, NRSV	**"being fully convinced"**
TEV	**"was absolutely sure"**
NJB	**"fully convinced"**
REB	**"convinced"**
Peshitta	**"felt assured"**

This is an AORIST PASSIVE PARTICIPLE, which denotes a full assurance of something (cf. Luke 1:1; Col. 4:12) or someone (cf. Rom. 4:21; 14:5). The NOUN is used of full assurance in Col. 2:2 and 1 Thess. 1:5. This confidence in God's will, word, and power enables humans to act in faith!

▣ **"what God had promised, He was able also to perform"** This is a PERFECT MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE, which meant an action in the past has come to consummation and issues into a state of being. The essence of faith is that one trusts in the character and promises of God (cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:20; Jude 24) and not in human performance. Faith trusts in the God of promises (cf. Isa. 55:11).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAEL'S GOD (OT)

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT PROMISES TO THE PATRIARCHS

4:22 This is an allusion to Gen. 15:6 (cf. Rom. 4:3), which is the key theological point of Paul's argument about how God gives His own righteousness to sinful humans. See Genesis notes online.

4:23-25 These verses are one sentence in Greek. Notice the theological progression.

1. for Abraham's sake, Rom. 4:23
2. for all believers' sake, Rom. 4:24
3. by God raising Jesus, Rom. 4:24
4. Jesus was given for our sin (cf. John 3:16), Jesus was raised for our sins to be forgiven (justification), Rom. 4:25

4:24 Abraham's faith became a pattern for all true descendants to follow. The NT focuses on the covenant with Abraham, not Moses or David! Abraham believed God about a promised son and descendants. New Covenant believers believe that Jesus the Messiah is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to fallen mankind.

The term "seed" is both SINGULAR and PLURAL (a son, a people).

▣ For "raised" see note at Rom. 8:11.

SPECIAL TOPIC: THE RESURRECTION

4:25 "who was delivered over because of our transgressions" This was a legal term which meant "to hand one over for punishment." Verse 25 is a wonderful Christological statement reflecting the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Isa. 53:11-12.

▣ **"was raised because of our justification"** The two clauses of Rom. 4:25 are parallel (same PREPOSITION and both are AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVES), but for stylistic not theological reasons (cf. Rom. 5:9-10; 2 Cor. 13:4). Frank Stagg's translation (*New Testament Theology*, p. 97) "delivered because of our transgressions and raised with a view to our being made righteous" has much to commend it. This interpretation involves the two aspects of Paul's use of the term "justify."

1. a forensic (legal) standing
2. a godly, Christlike life

The resurrection of Jesus is a central theological truth for Paul (cf. Rom. 1:3-4; 4:24-25; 6:4,9; 7:4; 8:11,34; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:3-11,20-23; 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:14; 5:15; 13:4; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 2:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:8). The tomb is empty or Christianity is a lie (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-19)!

SPECIAL TOPIC: SANCTIFICATION

SPECIAL TOPIC: RESURRECTION

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is this section of Romans so important?
2. Why did Paul use Abraham and David as examples?
3. Define the following key words, according to Paul's usage (not your definition)
    a. "righteousness"
    b. "reckoned"
    c. "faith"
    d. "promise"
4. Why was circumcision so important to the Jews (Rom. 4:9-12)?
5. To whom does "the seed" refer to in verses 13 and 16?

| Home | New Testament Studies | Romans Table of Contents | Previous Section | Next Section |

Copyright © 2014 Bible Lessons International